

ART. XXXIX.—*The Re-discovered Roman Inscription from Bowness.* By W. THOMPSON WATKIN.

Exhibited to the Society, August 28th, 1879.

IN the second volume of Hutchinson's History of Cumberland, (published in 1794,) p. 486, the following passage occurs :

"Some time ago, the following particulars were communicated to the *Cumberland Pacquet*:—'There was lately dug up at Bowness, in Cumberland, very near the western extremity of the Picts wall, and the most western station thereon, a red freestone, about three feet long, sixteen inches broad, and two inches and a half in thickness, with the inscription following, in Roman capitals:—

.....
ONIANVS DEPIC.....
 SEDDATE VITE IVRAQVARTVS
 SVPPLEAT VOTIS FIDEM
 AVREIS SACRABO CARMEN
 MOX VIRITIM LITTORIS
 VENVSI

"There are fragments of another line at the top; and probably there may have been several more, as it is impossible to ascertain what length it may have been when entire.

"We cannot vouch for the accuracy of the above inscription, as we have not had an opportunity of examining the original."

The stone mentioned in this passage appears to have been lost soon afterwards. Mr. R. S. Ferguson, F.S.A., has been able to obtain, from the files of the *Cumberland Pacquet*, a copy of the letter, which is signed "J. Smith," and dated from Carlisle, 5th January, 1791; it appeared in the *Pacquet* on the 12th of that month.*

In the summer of 1879, Mr. John Jackson, of the Carlisle Scientific Society, drew Mr. Ferguson's attention to

* Mr. Smith states the stone was "discovered by some persons digging for stones to build with, in the ruins of an ancient wall, which is said formerly to have surrounded the whole village, and is situated about a hundred yards south of the Picts Wall."

a stone bearing an inscription existing at Bowness, which the latter gentleman soon identified as that named by Hutchinson, and which had been so long missing. It was found in the possession of a Mr. Robinson, who said that his father ploughed it up, and that he had known it for thirty years. The dimensions had been incorrectly given, for it was found to measure in length $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches, width (on the right) $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and at the left extremity 11 inches, and was a slab of red sandstone.*

The long period during which it had been hidden (or probably re-buried) had been detrimental to the inscription, which was found partially encrusted with lime. The judicious application of lemon juice soon, however, removed most of this, and then it was at once seen that it had been to some extent wrongly read.

The first line was clearly ONIANVS DEDICO; in the second line the first two letters given by Mr. Smith as SE were obliterated, and it was doubtful whether the letters given as IT in VITE, the I in IVRA, and the R in QUARTVS were correct. In the fifth line it was evident that LITTERIS, instead of LITTORIS, was the correct reading, whilst the last line, VENVSI, if it ever existed, had been removed.

Such was the nature of the inscription when it came into the hands of epigraphists for critical treatment. Mr. Ferguson kindly favoured me with a photograph of it. The second line seemed alone difficult. Dr. Hübner, after seeing the photograph, wrote to me concerning it, that this "line. . D DAT, &c., remains as uncertain as before." The first improvement in reading the text of it was by Professor E. C. Clark, who rendered it as (PR)O DATE VT FETVRA QVARTIS. When favoured with this gentleman's reading by Mr. Ferguson, I at once accepted VT FETVRA

* It should be noticed that the present length of the stone, viz., $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches, coincides with its breadth, "about 16 inches broad," as given in the *Cumberland Pacquet*.—R. S. F.

as correct and warranted by the photograph, but rejected (PR)O on the ground that D was unmistakably the letter before DATE, and QVARTIS on the ground that the last letter but one was also unmistakably V. However, a start in emendation had been made, but the line still remained a puzzle. It was to my friend, Dr. McCaul of Toronto, that the correct reading was at last due. From a photograph which I had sent to him, this learned epigraphist at once read the line as:—

(SE) D DATE VT FETVRA QVÆSTVS.

and says in his letter announcing the fact, "I govern *quæstus* by *fidem*, *i.e.*, *sed date ut fetura suppleat fidem quæstus votis*. I suppose the object dedicated was a cow, and that the deities were Ceres and Sylvanus, or Triptolemus. But, however, that is a guess. It is of more consequence to settle the reading of what remains. I understand by *viritim*—*legendis a quoque viro*, *i.e.*, in golden letters for the use of each man."

Beyond the reference to *viritim*, Dr. McCaul gives no translation. This we will consider immediately. In the meantime it would seem that some pregnant animal had been made the subject of a prayer or vow, to two deities at least,—probably those named by Dr. McCaul. It would almost appear that the vow was that of several persons, but why should only one dedicate? I suggest the following collocation—*Sed date fidem ut fetura suppleat quæstus votis*," the meaning being: "But (ye Gods) give us your assurance that the production of the animal in question shall crown our vows with gains."

"AUREIS SACRABO CARMEN MOX VIRITIM LITTERIS."

"I (the dedicator) will commemorate the vow in golden letters."

The practice of placing inscriptions in golden letters is often referred to in ancient writers. Dr. McCaul refers to one of Pindar's Olympic Odes being so placed. There is
another

another example which I can add from the *Digest*, lib 41, tit. ix. s. i., where, in a long passage extracted from the works of Caius (or Gaius)—a jurist of the Antoninian age—the latter speaks of golden letters as a fact in Roman life. Pliny also tells us of their existence in the porch of the temple at Delphi.

The name of the dedicator has in all probability been some such name as VETTONIANVS.

But the peculiar and most interesting feature of the inscription is that it is in Trochaic Septenarian verse, and though breaches of quantity occur, it is on the whole about equal to other epigraphic poetry found in England, all of which is more or less disfigured in the same manner. The verses appear to be, in their present state,

“ONIANVS DEDICO

SED DATE VT FETVRA QVÆSTVS SVPPLEAT VOTIS FIDEM
AVREIS SACRABO CARMEN MOX VIRITIM LITTERIS.”

I should have said that subsequently to receiving from me Dr. McCaul's reading, Mr. Ferguson re-examined the stone (now in the Carlisle Museum) and confirmed the words VT FETVRA QVÆSTUS.

To abler hands I leave the confirmation or rejection of the translation, &c., which I have thus given, in the hope that it may be received with all toleration, as at least an attempt to determine the exact meaning of the verses.

APPENDIX.

The following is a letter from E. C. Clark, LL.D., Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge. It will be seen that it is dated prior to Mr. Watkin's communication. The “last printed reading” to which Professor Clark alludes was a newspaper one as follows:—

ONANIVS

ONIANVS DL
 LODATE VITE · IVRA QVARTVS
 SVPPLEATV · OTIS FIDM Q
 AVREIS · SACRABO CARMEN
 IOXV · IRITIM LITTERIS

The stops are, as the Professor suggests, flaws in the stone, probably done by a pick-axe, or plough share. The Q at end of third line is a mere conoid shelling of the stone.

Cambridge, Oct. 8th, 1879.

In reading the Bowness tablet it would seem that the first thing to do is to discard the apparent *stops*, which have, in the last printed reading, lead to a wrong division of the words. VOTIS, in the third line, and VIRITIM in the fourth, must be single words. The apparent stops, therefore, after the two Vs, may be disregarded, and, with them, all the rest. They are, in fact, mere flaws, lying pretty nearly in one line across the stone, and probably caused by contact with the edge of another stone. It is next clear from the two last lines, which are easily read, that the tablet records a *vow*, conditioned on some event happening. We should, therefore expect, in the first two lines, PRO with the ablative, or SI or QVOM with the subjunctive present.

It is, in the next place, a probability almost amounting to certainty, from the clear reading of the last two lines (Aureis sacrao carmen mox viritim litteris), from the insertion of the unnecessary MOX, and from the position of this word much *later* in the sentence than prose requires, that these lines, (and therefore probably the two first also,) are *metrical*. The metre is the common one of Trochaic Tetrameter Catalectic broken into two lines

“As in Porto Bello lying
 Our triumphant navy rode.”

I should, therefore, at once reject the idea of any more letters having followed the SVPPLEAT VOTIS FIDEM of the second line, which accurately corresponds in metre to the MOX VIRITIM LITTERIS of the fourth. The words appear to mean “should make credit good (*i.e.*, should answer, come up) to my (or our) prayers.” The accusative of fides is certainly used with *other* verbs in this sense, and *supplere*, in the sense of *making up* to a desired amount or standard, occurs in rather an interesting parallel expression: Virgil Buc. 7. 35-6, “Nunc te marmoreum pro tempore fecimus; at tu, Si fetura gregem suppleverit aureus esto,” to Priapus.

The

The second line is, of course, the crux. I disregard the dot in the middle of the first letter as merely a flaw, like the apparent stops. This letter may be either an O or a D, and I see the latter reading takes it, as I should myself, for the former, O. There is room before it, by comparison with the fourth line, for two letters, of which I can see no trace remaining. The horizontal flaw is too high for the bottom of an L. I do not regard the SE of the old reading as worth much, because of the following erroneous reading: VITE for VT²E, and the DEPIC (above) for what is certainly DED. The old transcriber, in fact, saw only what would make some sort of sense, *against* the evidence of his eyes. The only letters clear in the second line appear to me to be ODATEVT²ETVRAQVARTvS. The flaws at the angle in the last place but one are like a V, but are now too obviously in the condition of flaws to be conclusive against an I. The remains of carving in the crack, before ETVRA, are distinctly like an F.

I do not know the name of Datis, but very strange names of wives or concubines do occur in remote inscriptions. In spite of the homely character of the prayer, I should be disposed to read it:—

PRO DATE VT FETVRA QVARTIS
 SVPPLEAT VOTIS FIDEM
 AVREIS SACRABO CARMEN
 MOX VIRITIM LITTERIS

(Numerals, with *Vota*, are familiar to every collector of the later imperial coins).

“For Datis, that in childbirth she may make good my fourth prayers, (or *provided* she does so), I will shortly dedicate (this) strain in golden letters, VIRITIM.” The last word is a puzzle. It would naturally indicate the individual action, (or here, perhaps, the individual *names*,) of a number of men. But I see no preceding reference to any number of *men*; the word is occasionally used of *things* taken individually; and I think it may possibly refer to the *letters*, “in letters *all of gold*”—letter for letter—with no abbreviations or omissions.

The second word of the title is probably DEDICO; the first depends upon external evidence as to locality and the known names of persons in that locality. I find in Hübner's Corpus an [Ant]onianus and an [Apr]onianus.

Professor Clark added the following postscript after seeing Professor McCaul's reading and Mr. Watkin's letter:—

P.S. In view of the inscription, as represented in Mr. Watkin's letter, and Mr. Ferguson's re-examination of the stone, I give up my suggestion PRO DATE. The beginning may very well have run something like this:— Dis agrorum oves bovesque Nonianus dedico (*i.e.*, all my stock) sed date, &c., (quite a possible change to the vocative). Viritim *cannot*, I think, mean *legendis a quoque viro*; it either means *to each god*, or *in each letter*. The construction of *fetura*, &c., is, I think, *ut feturâ* (that by their produce) *quaestus* (nom.) *suppleat*, &c., my gain may answer my wishes.
